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THE DESERTED FARM;

OR,

WHY SHOULD NEW ENGLAND LAMENT?

BY

GEORGE WASHINGTON NIMS.

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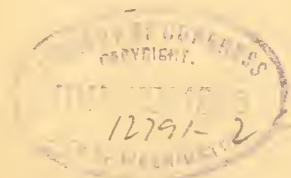
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BY

GEORGE WASHINGTON NIMS,

AUTHOR OF "THE SWEET AUBURN OF AMERICA," "FORSAKEN BY THE WORLD,"
"THE FUNCAID," "THE NINETEENTH CENTURY," "ALL THE RAGE,"
AND MANY MINOR PIECES.



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THE DESERTED FARM;

OR,

WHY SHOULD NEW ENGLAND LAMENT?

'MONG Hampshire's granite hills and valleys green,
Where fruitful nature blooms and fades between ;
Where rosy Spring her fairest blossoms blow,
And all the 'customed fruits in plenty grow ;
Where smiling Summer loves to weave her charms,
And sweetly smile upon the neighboring farms ;
Where golden Autumn crowns her finest crops,
And Winter decks the parting year with drops,—
'Tis here our old deserted farm is seen,
That once adorned with pride the wayside green,
Where butter, cheese, and milk, so sweet and pure,
Would yield the best that nature could procure,
While Industry retained her wonted sway,
And bade the budding fields to bloom like May.

Full twenty years ago these scenes occurred,
And with true zeal this peaceful valley stirred,
Where oft the farmer toiled from day to day,
Through winters cold and passing summers gay,
For glowing harvests, in their wonted time,
That pleased the rural rustic in his prime,
Who often sat around his social board,
With health and happiness so amply stored,
With rosy children five and buxom wife,
Securely free from greed and wanton strife.
Here, far removed from plagues, and cities too,
His children in the paths of virtue grew,
Secure from vice and every tempting sin
That might from good their early precepts win.
Contentment dwelt in every bosom here,
And mild affection shone with splendor clear.
'Twas here fair plenty crowned the rustic home,
And bade the most unsettled not to roam.
Here blossomed peace all through each season's day,
And grace and comfort ruled with gentle sway.
But now so changed! Dear farm, can I relate
Or mourn in sorrow o'er thy early fate?
Thy fields no longer yield the clover grass,
But weeds in plenty thrive one common mass.
No sprightly business teems as once before,
No wagons move along the clay-built shore,
No curling smoke the dust-worn chimney knows,

No winter-green beside the garden grows ;
The lowing herd no longer blocks the lane,
Nor roaming feeds along the fallow plain.
The pasture 's still, save where the cricket hums
Or when the cunning partridge slyly drums ;
While o'er it spring luxuriant weeds to view,
And shady bushes, green as ever grew.
The dark brown cider-mill has passed away,
And on the self-same spot the squirrels play,
Where many a workman toiled in harvest-time,
Till first appeared the long-expected rime ;
Where noisy urchins came to sip with glee
The grounded apple-juice that flowed so free,
While many a merry shout rang through the air
That caused the passing strangers oft to stare,
While many a story short was told in fun,
And many a joke that made the timid run.
But nothing now is left save vines to trace
Where once it stood : one solitary vase
Only 's escaped the ravages of time,
To slumber through its own sweet aged prime.
The miller, too, lies in his earthly bed ;
In peaceful silence lays among the dead
The faithful mare that ably turned the wheel,
Who sometimes for a change would loudly squeal,
To scare the noisy youngsters from the mill,
Or to remind his gentle master Bill

Of his accustomed meal he loved so well,
While here it was his destined lot to dwell,—
Now sweetly rests forever free from toil,
From care, beneath the cold, unfeeling soil.
Such are the changes that have slowly come
Since last the cider-mill was wont to hum.
The farm-house, too, a lonely aspect wears,
While melancholy blooms and widely bears.
Deserted now is every room, I see,
Dear native cot that sheltered infancy.
Gay spiders build where beauty bloomed before,
And softly creep along the moss-grown floor ;
Wild insects thrive among the closets cold,
And saucy look at every stranger bold ;
The brick-worn hearth is crumbling down,
And lonely seems as misers in the town.
As here I muse, in contemplation stand,
How many a joy drifts back upon my mind ;
How fondly still dear Memory greets me here,
And blest Remembrance sheds the heart-felt tear !
I ponder as I hear the cricket sing,
As back to me in thought past seasons bring ;
I list to hear some old familiar strain
From tongues that long beneath the turf have lain ;
I listen oft, but all in vain, to hear.
They'll ne'er return from out their prisons drear,
Save where the wood-tick gnaws the rotting beam

And hornets on the falling rafters teem ;
Save where the spider weaves her silken nest,
And noisy flies become a sickening pest.
Where once the pantry stood now dust reclines,
Forsaken and o'ergrown with running vines.
No dainty sweets now tempt the watery tongue,
Where oft before the blue-eyed youngsters sung.
The threshold's gone where many a stranger trod,
Lies strewn in fragments on the dewy sod.
'Twas here the weary traveller sought a shelter
When storms against the window-panes would pelter.
The friendless beggar found a welcome hearth,
To him the dearest spot on all our earth.
Benevolence shone brightly on us all,
From gray-haired sire serene to urchin small ;
But selfishness ne'er found a welcome here,
Beneath this humble roof to me so dear.
Cold avarice chose a safer isle to rest,
'Mong misers' homes, to prove a damning pest.
Here oft the sprightly joke passed harmless round
Above, to me, this consecrated ground ;
While round the fire, from daily labor free,
We sat and talked of this and that and thee,
Full many a thrilling story told in fun,
And many a time we cracked a knotty pun.
No different ours from many another's lot,—
Awhile to prosper, then to be forgot :

The same emotions heaved within the breast,
While soothing comfort found a bower of rest ;
The same deep-furrowed wrinkles marked the brow,—
While, standing here, I seem to see them now.
These joys, to me they have a dearer fame
Than all the gorgeous charms that wealth may claim.
Thrice hallowed seems this sacred spot to me,
O blest retreat of peace and infancy !
Left for the tooth of time to slowly gnaw,
Left to partake of desolation's war.
Can I forget where my dear mother died,
Where I so oft the scalding tears have dried,—
Forget those parting words she gave to me ?
As long as life remains, that ne'er can be.
Tho' dingy are its walls and ceilings old,
And blustering winds blow 'long the fading mould,
Tho' thro' the panes the summer sunshine glances,
And golden glow-worms on the mantle prances,
Tho' mildew decks the tottering front-way door,
And rusts the knob that turned the lock before,
Tho' naught remains to my reflecting view
Of all the scenes that formerly I knew,
Yet strangely dear these time-worn relics still,
And in my heart a dearer crevice fill
Than all the pomp of wealth or splendor's host,
Than all the treats the fairest clime may boast.
Where once the lamb had lain, the thistle grows,

And roses wild bloom all along in rows.
 The barley field, where once the oxen turned
 The mellow sod and rural lessons learned,
 Long since the mountain grass has seeded o'er
 This granary patch the rustic could adore.
 The lowland orchard, too, laments her fate,
 Where peaches, pears, and plums, of sizes great,
 Hung tempting on full many a spreading limb,
 Suspended 'bove the ground so sleek and trim ;
 Where many an apple ripened rich to view,
 Both sour and sweet, as fine as ever grew.
 But changed now, here and there an aged tree,
 A rotting stump, remains : that's all I see.
 One solitary tree I scan with fruit
 Of all the scion-grafts that used to shoot,
 That used to bear all o'er this fruitage field,—
 Departed shades to recollection sealed,
 Like former kingdoms, flourished for a while,
 Only to reap, at last, a funeral pile ;
 Since beauty, wealth, and all that earth can give
 Can only just so long a season live.
 The slow-decaying barns with yonder shed
 Long empty've been, with all their contents fled ;
 Bring back again a thousand childish tricks
 So cutely played, a hundred boastful licks.
 Forsaken now and free from wood and hay,
 They trembling stand, and slumber thro' the day.

No more the lowing cow nor dog's loud bark
Shall cause the sitting hen to seek her ark.
The petted lamb, so meek, and tender boss
No more will o'er their sinking sleepers cross.
Never again the swallow build her nest,
Or sing so sweetly on the dusty crest ;
Nor hear again the Devon bullock roar,
Or fighting gobblers o'er the granary soar.
Now, winter's blasts blow unprotected in,
And sweep alike the stall, the mow, and bin.
Their massive doors in numerous fragments lay
Strewn o'er the ground beside the carriage way.
Their walls as cheerless look, tho' standing still,
All weather-worn like yonder slanting sill,
While warping shingles fall, thro' sheer neglect,
By blustering gales, and quickly join the wrecked.
Their mouldering beams and creaking rafters sigh,
And seem to whisper low, "We soon must die."
Each scaffold's bare that once was loaded o'er
With new-mown hay that found a welcome store.
Our granary shed, the same, bows in decay,
Neglected and forgot beside the way,
Left in its helpless age to die alone,
At last to be forgotten and unknown,
Where many a load of well-cut wood reclined,
And many a kitten sly both slept and dined,—
A storehouse for the farmer's knicks and knacks,

For numerous household tools and bags and sacks.
Now, only dust can here and there be seen,
With weeping fragments strewn by chance between.
Here, nestled 'mong these neighboring hills around,
Our old deserted farm lies all unsound,
Approaching fast the centre of decay,
With all its cherished beauties passed away.
As o'er its acres broad once more I look,
And scan the buildings old by all forsook,
The tear of pity melts my aching heart.
While loved imagination plies her art,
Each fading object trace that still remains.
The grassy well that cheered the rustic swains
With cheerful draughts that never added woe
Like stronger drinks that naught but misery sow,
Tho' long since dried, its recollections please
Almost as well as when, upon my knees
Long years ago, it quenched my parching thirst,
As many a time I ran to find it first.
But 'twas in haying time the fondest treat,
The boon companion that I loved to greet,
Nourished by crystal springs from mountains high
That towering soared to kiss the bending sky.
No wonder that I loved to linger here
In far the warmest season of the year,
And by its waters let my system cool,
Tho' prudently and by kind Wisdom's rule.

The woodland grove, where swings were hung with glee,
Where winsome lads and bonnie lasses free
'Mong rural sports would often gayly swing
High in mid air within the swallow's ring ;
Where picnics sought a calm retreat with joy
From worldly cares and scenes that might annoy,—
Such picnics, too, where bashful lovers met
Beneath the shade to pay the pledged-for debt,
And slyly muse on future plans in view,
On tranquil joys, tho' old, still ever new ;
Where oft the parson came to bless the throng,
To laugh and sing among the weak and strong ;
The village squire enjoyed the pleasing scenes,
And gayly romped with lasses in their teens,
Forgot his age, and seemed a child again,
As 'round he wandered 'mong the young and vain.
But where's the grove to-day? In ruins lie,
And scarce perceived by many a passer-by.
The woodman's fated axe has cleared the lot,
And humbly wrecked this long-forsaken spot,
So dear by old association's ties.
Sweet, shady grove, that now so dreary lies,
'Twas greedy gain that robbed thee of thy shades,
And burned the flow'rs upon the moorland glades,
Laid bare thy welcome knolls to summer's rays,
And bade the roaming cattle on them graze ;
And all thy loved retreats and cosey nooks,

Whose loss can ne'er be told in common books,
Have mutilated been by strangers' hands,
And barren seem as Milo's drifting sands.
Hard be the power that mars such fair abodes,
And very strict, indeed, its laws and codes !
But vain and useless 'tis to now complain
Or to lament o'er long-forgotten pain.
The brooklet pool where once the duckies swam
A proper distance from the slender dam ;
Yes, where my schoolmates learned to dive and swim,
And grumbling Thompson looked so sour and grim ;
Where fish of varied kinds were wont to breed,
And on the lazy, creeping insects feed ;
Where golden lilies bloomed beside their pads,
The joy of maids, the pride of youthful lads ;
Where many a passing hour we thoughtless strayed,
And many a boyish freak was cutely played,—
Now naught is left for me this spot to trace,
So widely altered is this humble place.
Now, shooting reeds in lonely silence blow,
And fragrant pennyroyal loves to grow ;
Now, cunning muskrats bore their winding holes,
And thrive among the dreamy meadow moles.
Naught now remains to please as once before,
Since every charm has left its time-worn shore.
The woodland forest gay has long been cleared,
Where many a hunter's game was kindly reared,

Only to be by heartless men ensnared
Before their time, before they'd rightly paired.
How little cares the hunter and his hound,
If only they secure them on the ground,—
The squirrel, partridge, fox, and crafty geese,—
And cause their terms of happiness to cease!
For gain, the stately oak and breezy pine,
The cedar tall, and mated hemlock fine,
Have laid their armors down long years ago,
And from their stations high descended low.
Those towering shades that sheltered from the sun
Lie now a dreary waste, lie all undone.
No friendly hand has sought to clear them up,
Or near its borders wished to dine or sup.
Oh, dismal glen, with here and there a stump,
A half-grown tree or creeping ivy-clump,
That bids the stranger pause! The underbrush
Where gay's before I hear the hermit thrush
Sing sweetly in the morning's crystal air,
And chickadees as softly peep and pair;
Where many a charming wild-flower shoots its blows
'Mid barren scenes and desolation's woes;
Where sylvan birds melodiously sing
Their ditties o'er while soaring on the wing,
As if to cheer what avaricious man
Had in his eager haste forgot to scan.
How true, when I repeat deserted farm,

Its beauties flown, and every *welcome charm*.
And all that once the farmer prized with joy
And all on which he could his time employ,
Depopulated, and by some forgot,
'These relics stand,—the barn, the shed, and cot!
Let proud professions slur the rustic's life,
Where peace and comfort reign so free from strife;
Let city hirelings rail with bitter scorn,
And prouder dunces blow their little horn;
Let shopworn toil put on some distant airs,
And crafty idlers rave like mountain bears;
Let simple Fashion scowl and wave her hands,
And try to underrate the farmer's lands.
Give me these self-same acres broad
Where oft before our native fathers trod.
Give me the cultivated farm to till,
The situation that I'd love to fill,
The farm; for I must independent be,
Aloof from worldly strife and passion's sea,
'To nurture and to taste the farmer's joys,
His cheering hopes, and prize what he employs.
Where else on earth can summer bloom so fair?
Where else can people dwell so free from care?
Unlike the city where the wretched sin,
And many a rascal steals his food to win;
Where Avarice tries to get the stranger's all,
And folly often makes the reckless fall;

To follow stocks' uncertain freaks and turns,
Until thro' sense some wiser lesson learns.
Oh, take advice, and stay upon the farm,
Far, far removed from every vicious harm ;
Let not such barren fields so oft appear,
But cultivate in peace, rich harvests rear,
Take pride in rural sports and country scenes,
And cause to bloom again these fading greens.
From overcrowded cities stand aloof,
And list to gentle judgment's mild reproof.
Go seek the home where you may prosper best,
So win sweet comfort, joy, and fruitful rest.
Then bide content, and ne'er unsettled be,
'Mid childhood's scenes and joys of infancy.

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